

The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition

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Janet Gyatso

THE LOGIC OF
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Coinciding approximately with the close of the great influx and translation of Indian Buddhist scriptures in Tibet, there appeared a new sort of Buddhist scripture, created in Tibet. Even though Indic origin had become a fundamental criterion of what could be regarded as authentic Buddhist scripture, indigenously produced texts were able, in some corners of the developing Tibetan Buddhist scene, to acquire a legitimacy and sacred status that approached that of the Indic texts.¹ These Tibetan scriptures have been dubbed *Treasures* (*gter-ma*). They have been produced not only by Buddhists but also by the Bon-pos; in what follows I shall be focussing on the Buddhist Treasures, but much of

I am grateful to Steven Collins and Donald Lopez for their helpful comments made on an earlier draft of this essay. A typescript draft of this article has been cited in several sources with the title "The Internal Logic of Legitimation as Presented in the Tibetan Treasure Cycles," or a variation thereof.

¹ In the first phases of Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist scriptures were imported and translated into Tibetan from central and east Asia as well as from India. An early specification of India as the authentic source of Buddhism occurred at the so-called Council of Tibet. The next major manifestation of Tibetan deference to Indian Buddhism was the invitation of the Indian teacher Atiśa to Tibet in the eleventh century to purge aberrant tantric practices that had developed in Tibet after the fall of the Yarlung dynasty. Later, Bu-ston Rin-chen Grub (1290–1364) and others established Indic origins as a prerequisite for a text's inclusion in the Tibetan Buddhist canon: see David Ruegg, *The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che* (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966), pp. 27–30, esp. p. 28, n. 1. Ruegg notes the differing approach of Tibetan scholars such as Padma dKar-po (1526–92), for whom the soteriological value of a work determined its genuineness as a Buddhist scripture. Note that Padma dKar-po regards the legends of the origin of the Treasures as authentic (Ruegg, pp. 29–30n).

what I will say can apply to the Bon-po Treasures as well, since there has been considerable mutual influence between these two Tibetan religions. My principal interest in this essay is to analyze the arguments and strategies devised by the Treasure proponents in making a case for the Treasures' legitimacy.

The Buddhist Treasures' narrative of their own origins maintains that they are special teachings, initially preached by a buddha, which came to be hidden in Tibet by Padmasambhava, the Indian master of the eighth century famed for introducing tantric Buddhism in Tibet.² Padmasambhava is said to have concealed these teachings in such a way that they would be discovered at a later date by various predetermined Tibetan Treasure discoverers (*gter-ston*), who would then "translate" their revelation into a form comprehensible to their contemporaries.

The introduction of Buddhist scriptures claiming to have such a source has occurred often in the rNying-ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. Persons purporting to be Treasure discoverers engage in a complex process of preparation, involving the cultivation of special meditative states, which culminates in the unearthing of a text or group of texts, usually in a concise, encoded form.³ The site from which such

² Padmasambhava is not the only source of the Treasure texts, but I have used his name for convenience in this discussion, as the majority of Treasures are traced to him. However, there is the important *Bi ma snying thig* cycle, discovered by lDang-ma lHun-rgyal (eleventh century), that represents the teachings of Vimalamitra (eighth century). The *Mañi bka' 'bum* Treasure is said to be largely the teachings of Srong-btsan sGam-po (seventh century). The historian dPa'-bo gTsug-lag 'Phreng-ba, in his *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (written 1565) (Peking: Mi-rigs dPe sKrun-khang, 1986), 1:625, lists these concealers of Treasure in addition to Padmasambhava: 'Tsho-rgyal, Khri Srong-lde bTsan, Mu-tig bTsan-po, sNubs Nam-mkha' sNying-po, sNyags (Jñānakumāra), Vairocana, sNa-nam rDo-rje bDud-'joms, and sNubs Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes. The Mental Treasure traditions are often traced to a relatively later Tibetan teacher; for example, 'Jam-dbyangs mKhyen-btse dBang-po's (1820–92) *Grub thob thugs tig* Treasure is claimed to be the teaching of Thang-stong rGyal-po (1361–1485), in turn said to be an emanation of Padmasambhava: see Kong-sprul Blo-gros mTha'-yas (1813–99), ed., *Rin chen gter mdzod*, reproduced at the order of the Venerable Dingo Chhentse Rimpoche, sTod-lung mTshu-phu edition, supplemented with texts from the dPal-spungs edition and other manuscripts, 111 vols. (Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup & Sherap Drimay, 1976), vols. 4, 17, 24. Treasures outside the rNying-ma tradition include the *Ro-snyoms* cycle said to have been hidden by Naropa and discovered by Ras-chung-pa (b. 1084) (see Kong-sprul Blo-gros mTha'-yas, *gDams ngag mdzod* [Delhi: N. Lungtok and N. Gyaltsen, 1971], 7:59–88), and teachings on gCod said to have been concealed by Ma-gcig Lab-sgron (eleventh century) for the benefit of future generations (see Khams-smyon 'Jigs-bral Chos-kyi Seng-ge, *Zhi byed dang gcod yul gyi chos 'byung rin po che'i 'phreng ba thar pa'i rgyan*, in *gCod kyi chos skor* [New Delhi: Tibet House, 1974], p. 557). I have not seen a use of the threefold transmission paradigm that I will discuss below to authenticate non-rNying-ma Treasures.

³ Note, however, that not all Treasures are texts. In Janet Gyatso, "Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The Gter-ma Literature" (to be published by Snow Lion Press in a volume in honor of Geshe Sopa edited by Jose Cabezon and Roger Jackson), I discuss the

a text is extracted can be the ground, a side of a mountain, a cave, the interior of a statue, a temple wall, or even the recesses of the mind or memory itself, as is claimed in the case of the Mental Treasures (*dgongs-gter*).⁴ The first discovery of a Buddhist Treasure text is located in the eleventh century.⁵ It seems that the circle of adherents was initially small and rather marginal, but by the thirteenth century they are attested in contemporary sources and are a well-defined movement.⁶ A prolific group of discoverers was active in the nineteenth and

wide variety of objects that are discovered as Treasures. This also includes texts that do not have any particular religious significance. The process of revealing and legitimizing these other types of Treasure is not necessarily the same as that involved in the discovery of scriptures. On the question of Treasure codes and their decoding, see Janet Gyatso, "Signs, Memory and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1986): 7–35.

⁴ No modern studies have been made of an actual Treasure discovery. The discoverers usually work in private or with a small group of very trusted disciples, but as mentioned below, public Treasure discovery also occurs not infrequently.

⁵ The first discoverer listed is almost always Sangs-rgyas Bla-ma, as in O-rgyan Gling-pa (1323–ca. 1360), *O rgyan guru padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs rnam par thar pa rgyas pa bkod pa padma bka'i thang yig* (*Padma bka' thang shel brag ma*), xylograph from blocks carved in 1966 at Rumtek, preserved at Nyishang Takashar Monastery in the Manang area of Nepal (n.p., 1972), fol. 197a. The most extensive hagiographical study of the Treasure discoverers is to be found in Kong-sprul Blo-gros mTha'-yas, *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bkod pa rin chen baidurya'i phreng ba*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, 1:291–759. See also Ramon Pratz, *Contributo allo studio biografico dei primi Gter-ston*, ser. Minor, vol. 17 (Naples: Napoli Istituto universitario orientale, Seminario di studi asiatici, 1982). Closely derivative of Kong-sprul's work, although sometimes adding new information, is the sixth chapter of bDud-'joms 'Jigs-bral Ye-shes rDo-rje (1904–87), *Gang ljongs rgyal bstan yongs rdzogs kyi phyi ma snga 'gyur rdo rje theg pa'i bstan pa rin po che ji ltar byung ba'i tshul dag cing gsal bar brjod pa lha dbang gyul las rgyud ba'i rnga bo che'i sgra dbyangs* (Kalimpong: Dudjom Tulku Rinpoche, 1967) (abbreviated hereafter as bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*). This text is translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, trans. and ed. Gyurme Dorje with the collaboration of Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom, 1991), 1:401–973. Parts of this same chapter by bDud-'joms Rinpoche, along with the passages from Kong-sprul's *gTer rnam rgya brtsa*, have been translated in Eva Dargay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).

⁶ Guru Chos-dbang's (1212–70) defense of the Treasure addition is important evidence of the critiques leveled against the tradition by that century: *Ghu ru chos dbang gis gter 'byung chen mo* (abbreviated hereafter as *gTer 'byung chen mo*) in *The Autobiography and Instructions of Gu-ru Chos-kyi-dbañ-phyug*, reproduced from a manuscript from the library of the late Lopon Choedak at the order of H. H. Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche (Paro, Bhutan: Ugyen Tempai Gyaltsen, 1979), 1:75–193, see esp. pp. 104–11. (I have discussed this text in "Guru Chos-dbang's Analysis of the gTer-ma Tradition and his Presentation of Bon-po gTer" [paper presented at the International Association of Tibetan Studies conference, Fagernes, Norway, August 21–28, 1992], to be published in the proceedings of that meeting.) However, dPa'-bo gTsug-lag 'Phreng-ba's sixteenth-century *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* is the earliest text independent of the Treasure tradition that I have found that describes the Treasure scriptures at some length and as a separate tradition: see vol. 1, pp. 624–50. bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan's *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (written 1388?) (Dolanji: Patshang Lama Sonam Gyaltsen, 1973) is an earlier historical

twentieth centuries, and the tradition still continues today, both in exile and in Tibet.⁷

The many Treasure scriptures and related literature came to be collected in various corpora, the largest of which, the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, fills more than 108 volumes in its present edition.⁸ Although these texts have had many detractors, some of the Treasure texts had great impact on Tibetan Buddhism as a whole, especially those relating to the Yarlung dynasty, the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, and Tibet's pervasive Avalokiteśvara cult, as well as such popular works as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In addition to establishing the mythology of the Tibetan dynastic period, many of the Treasure scriptures introduce new *sādhana*s (meditative visualization techniques), yogic techniques, liturgies, rituals, methods for the manufacture of religious art, dance, and architecture, and statements of philosophy and doctrine. Many also make reference to contemporary political events (contemporary, that is, to the discoverer), couched as prophecies uttered by Padmasambhava in the past.

In order to appreciate the complex questions that arise regarding the legitimacy, sacred status, and authorship of these texts, we need to note, first of all, the connotations of the term *Treasure* itself. *Treasure* has the specific import of contrasting with the rubric of *Spoken* (*bka'-ma*), which labels those scriptures that are said to originate in the overt "well-stated speech" (Sanskrit *subhāṣitapravacana*) of the Buddha himself. Generally speaking, the Spoken scriptures are those that constitute the conventional Tibetan Buddhist canon, the *bKa'-gyur*.⁹ It

work that also treats the Treasures at length, but this work is closely based on the Treasure tradition. The Treasures are mentioned only rarely and in passing in 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba gZhon-nu dPal (1392–1481), *Deb ther sngon po*, translated in George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949).

⁷ Outstanding Treasure discoverers of the nineteenth century were 'Jam-dbyangs mKhyen-brtse dBang-po (1820–92) and mChog-gyur bDe-chen Zhig-po Gling-pa (1829–70). Among the widely recognized discoverers in the twentieth century have been bDud-'joms Rinpoche and Dil-mgo mKhyen-brtse Rinpoche Rab-gsal Zla-ba (1910–91). There are several reports of discoverers at present active in Tibet that are circulating among Treasure enthusiasts in exile, although Treasure discovery, as well as oracle possession and divination, was made illegal in Tibet after the Cultural Revolution; more recently this ban appears to have been lifted.

⁸ Kong-sprul, ed., *Rin chen gter mdzod*. See Gene Smith's introduction to Kong-sprul's *Shes bya kun khyab*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1970), pp. 59–63. Many Treasure cycles were also published independently in Tibet, reprints and new editions of which are available among the Tibetan literature published since the 1960s in India. For a survey of the contents of the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, see my "Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury."

⁹ This term is closely related to Sanskrit *buddhavadana*, Tibetan *sangs-rgyas-kyi gsung*. For a recent Tibetan analysis of its types and criteria by a representative of the Treasure tradition see discussion in bDud-'joms 'Jigs-bral Ye-shes rDo-rje, *gSang sngags snga 'gyur rnying ma ba'i bstan pa'i rnam gzhaq mdo tsam brjod pa legs bshad snang*

should be noted, however, that the distinction implied by this terminology is misleading, since the Treasure scriptures are also claimed to have originated in a kind of buddha speech. Thus, what really distinguishes Treasures from the Spoken scriptures is the process by which the text is transmitted after its original exposition. Spoken scriptures are believed to have been passed from master to disciple down to the present in an unbroken succession; the implication is that this transmission involved direct human contact between master and disciple (in which speech would have been one of the principal forms of communication). Treasure transmission, which is passed down from master to disciple too, at least during part of its history, is also conveyed via other, extraordinary measures during the period of interment when the scripture “goes underground” and is not “spoken” or overtly taught at all for a number of generations.¹⁰ Further, I would draw attention to

ba'i dga' ston (abbreviated hereafter as *bsTan pa'i rnam gzhag*), translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:43–379; see pp. 73–87. Note that, in the context of Vajrayāna Buddhism, to which the Treasures are closely linked, the buddha who utters the “speech of the Buddha” is not limited to the historical buddha Śākyamuni, but includes such expositors of the tantras as the buddhas Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, Mahāvairocana, and others, who sometimes are made to be tantric manifestation of Śākyamuni during his lifetime, and other times are buddhas of a different age and place. For the *bsTan pa'i rnam gzhag*'s rendition of the varieties of buddha emanations who preached scriptures, see Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:134 et seq. Note that the rNying-ma-pa canonical collection known as the *bKa'-ma* is a special collection that does not contain all scriptures deemed by the rNying-ma-pas to be the word of the Buddha. Rather, it is a small collection first edited by gTer-bdag Gling-pa and sMin-gling Lo-chen Dharmasri and later redacted by rDzogs-chen rGyal-sras gZhan-phan mTha'-yas and others, and it contains primarily ritual and liturgical material associated with several canonical scriptures, primarily but not exclusively tantric. Several versions of this collection are available at present. The longest is that one that has been edited and enlarged by bDud-'joms Rinpoche and published several times, most recently in *The Tibetan Tripitaka* (Taipei: SMC, 1991), vols. 64–72 (equivalent to fifty-eight *pothi* volumes).

¹⁰ However, since the Treasure tradition is pressed to demonstrate that it has precedents in Indian Buddhism, at least one particularly ambitious Treasure apologist, namely, Guru Chos-dbang, goes so far as to claim that many texts that are conventionally considered to be Spoken—including sections of the Vinaya, a variety of sūtras and tantras, and even śāstras such as Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*—were at one point or another hidden like Treasure and then later retrieved. See Guru Chos-dbang, *gTer 'byung chen mo*, esp. pp. 89–91. More generally, the standard rNying-ma-pa narratives of the transmission in India of some of the Old Tantras (see n. 34 below) that are usually classified as Spoken include segments that involve Treasure-like moments, particularly the concealing of the *sgrub-sde* section of the Mahāyoga tantras in a stūpa at the Śītavana charnel ground by the *dākinī* *Mahākarmendrānī and their later retrieval by the eight *ācāryas* (see, e.g., bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*, pp. 110–11, translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:482–83; cf. dPa'-bo gTsong-lag, 1:611 et seq.) and the hiding of the *man-ngag sde* section of the Atiyoga tantras in temples at bKra-shis Khri-ngo and Byang-chub Shing (both purportedly in China) by Śrī Singha and subsequent unearthing by Jñānasūtra (bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*, pp. 132–35, translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:498–501; cf. dPa'-bo gTsong-lag, 1:568–69). We must also note that, according to the colophons of many of the Old Tantras in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, these texts were concealed and later revealed as Treasure in Tibet. Compare Roerich, p. 192 et seq.

the significance of the fact that a pivotal role in the very formulation of the Treasure scriptures is explicitly attributed to certain historical Tibetans, a role quite absent in the Spoken transmission process. It is precisely around this latter issue that much of the controversy regarding legitimacy centers. And it is for that reason that we can recognize so much equivocation concerning the question of authority. Even though the discoverer is recognized as the one who codified the scripture in its present form, pains are taken to avoid any claim of authorship on his part, and rather to attribute authorship, ultimately, to a buddha.¹¹ Nonetheless, the description of the discoverers' role in the production of the Treasure scripture clearly functions as a self-legitimation and self-aggrandizement for those individuals, attributing to them special abilities, and garnering, in many cases, a considerable following. This last point, of course, reveals the stakes of our entire subject matter.

From the perspective of the critical historian of religion, the Treasure texts may aptly be termed *apocrypha*, divergences between the Buddhist context and the Judeo-Christian one in which that term originates notwithstanding.¹² Deemed sacred only by their adherents, the Treasure texts were subject to the critique of being spurious by members of the mainstream schools of Tibetan Buddhism, who produced a

¹¹ For a discussion of the problems related to the issue of authorship in the Treasures and other kinds of Tibetan literature inspired by vision, see Janet Gyatso, "Genre, Authorship, and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism: The Literary Traditions of Thangstong rGyal-po," in *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, ed. Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 95–106.

¹² Recently attention has been paid to the nature and role of Buddhist apocryphal literature, most notably in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "Introduction: Prolegomenon to the Study of Buddhist Apocryphal Scriptures," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Buswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 1–30. In his introduction (p. 1) Buswell adopts the term in a loose sense to refer to any Buddhist scripture purported to have been translated from an Indian language that in fact was not. Buswell later notes the variety of denotations and connotations that *apocrypha* carried in the West, the earliest of which refers to writings that are "hidden away" or "secret" and that were "withheld from public knowledge because they were vehicles of . . . esoteric wisdom." (Buswell here quotes R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, vol. 1 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913] p. viii.) This definition is appropriate indeed as a description of the Treasure texts, more so than it is for virtually any other Buddhist candidate for inclusion under that rubric. Matthew Kapstein, "The Purificatory Gem and Its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts," *History of Religions* 28 (1989): 220, shows on different grounds that the Treasures are one of the rare classes of literature in Buddhism that merit the label of *apocrypha* as it was applied to New Testament literature, namely, as "writings which have not been received into the canon, but which . . . lay claim to be in the same class with the writings of the canon." (Kapstein here quotes Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 1:27.) As Kapstein rightly notes, whereas most Buddhist apocrypha have found their way into a canon, the Treasure texts remained extracanonical, despite their perceived equivalence to canonical scriptures within the Treasure tradition itself.

substantial body of polemical writings on this issue.¹³ The Treasures can also be called *pseudepigrapha*, in that their original authorship is attributed to a buddha, a claim for which historical evidence is lacking, as is any evidence of their having been preached and then concealed by Padmasambhava in the eighth century. For these reasons, a number of modern Tibetologists, in addition to traditional Tibetan Buddhists, have deprecated the Treasures for their fraudulence and the unhistorical nature of the Padmasambhava legend, although some have also noted that certain Treasures contain authentically ancient materials.¹⁴

¹³ See Kapstein for a study of one such assault on the Treasures, i.e., that by Sum-pa mKhan-po (1704–87), and its rejoinder by Thu'u-bkwan Chos-kyi Nyi-ma (1737–1802), along with a useful summary of polemical literature concerning the rNying-ma-pa tradition and some comments on the political and sectarian issues that influenced the content of such exchanges.

¹⁴ A. I. Vostrikov, *Tibetan Historical Literature* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1970), p. 27, maintains that the majority of “so-called ‘*gter-ma* books’” are fake, “passed on as works of celebrated men of the past,” and “sometimes made to look emphatically mysterious and strange,” although he also thinks that the Treasures contain some authentically ancient passages. Vostrikov is in agreement with the highly sceptical view of L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* (London, 1895), pp. 56–58, 165–66. R. A. Stein shares Vostrikov's view: see *Tibetan Civilization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 274–75. Scholars who have studied the Treasures for their literary value and the historical information that can be gleaned from scrutiny of their legends include Guiseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome: La libreria dello stato, 1949), 1:109 et seq., who considers the development of the Treasures and their doctrinal impact. David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson go so far as to claim that “no imaginative and roguish group of Tibetans sat down to invent all the stuff out of their heads” (*A Cultural History of Tibet* [Boston: Shambhala, 1986] p. 172). Excellent work has been done on various historical questions involving the Treasure materials by Anne-Marie Blondeau: see her “Le Lha-'dre bKa'-thañ,” in *Études Tibétaines Dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 33–126, “Analysis of the Biographies of Padmasambhava according to Tibetan Tradition: Classification of Sources,” in *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, ed. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1980), pp. 45–52, “Le ‘Découvreur’ du Mani Bka'-'bum était-il Bon-po?” in *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*, ed. Louis Ligeti (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), pp. 77–123, “Mkhyen-brce'i Dbā-po: La Biographie de Padmasambhava selon la tradition du Bsgrags-Pa Bon, et ses sources,” in *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata*, ed. G. Gnoli and L. Lanciotti (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1985), “Une Polémique sur l'authenticité des Bka'-thañ au 17e siècle,” in *Silver on Lapis: Tibetan Literary Culture and History*, ed. Christopher I. Beckwith (Bloomington, Ind., Tibet Society, 1987), pp. 125–60, and “La controverse soulevée par l'inclusion de rituels bon-po dans le Rin-chen gter-mjod: Note préliminaire,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 4th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, ed. Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung (Munich: Kommission für Zentralasiatische Studien Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988), pp. 55–67. Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450–1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683–1706)* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989), writes of “the entirely fabricated nature of the Tibetan ‘treasure-text’” (p. 96), asserting that “the whole cult depended on conscious pretence and fraud” (p. 97) but adding that “this does not mean that we should therefore take an unsympathetic view of its prime members or of its ultimate purpose.” However, Aris endeavors to demonstrate that the discoverer Padma Glingpa was a charlatan, had psychological problems, and employed a variety of techniques to forge Treasures: see esp. pp. 33, 35, 98–101.

From the traditional Tibetan Buddhist perspective, there are several interrelated dimensions of what constitutes scriptural authenticity and legitimacy, and several grounds on which such legitimacy can be doubted in the case of the Treasures. The most obvious set of questions that arise concerns the historicity of the Treasures' claims of origin: Was the text in fact ever preached by a buddha? Did Padmasambhava really hide the text, in encoded form, in the late eighth century? Questions about historical veracity can also be directed to the discovery of the Treasure, centuries later. Is the discovered text the very same encoded fragment that Padmasambhava concealed for future generations? And was it in fact "discovered"? Did not the discoverer simply forge the Treasure himself?

But there is also another (although not entirely unrelated) set of questions that are *ad hominem*, focusing on the legitimacy of the scripture's author, and it is this issue that will come to the fore in the Treasure-legitimizing strategy, ultimately overshadowing questions of historical veracity per se. The authority of the imputed original formulator of the Treasure can easily be asserted in normative terms—after all, he is a buddha—but the matter of qualifications becomes tricky with regard to the Treasure discoverer, who is indeed himself a "historical" figure, and subject to critique and suspicion on the part of his contemporaries. Given that it is admitted that the particular form in which the Treasure text is finally published and presented to the world will in fact have been written and codified by the discoverer (even if its inspiration is attributed to Padmasambhava and ultimately its original buddha preacher), it needs to be demonstrated somehow that he or she has the requisite realizations and attainments to formulate and transmit authentic Buddhist teachings.

In sum, there are several kinds of questions that motivate the self-legitimizing strategies developed in the Treasure tradition. But before we examine those strategies we might recall that doubts about the historicity of a scripture's imputed origin can be, and sometimes have been, raised not only with regard to the Treasures, but also regarding all of the Indic Buddhist tantras, as well as all of the Mahāyāna sūtras, and even many, if not all, scriptures of the Pāli canon.¹⁵ Moreover, several modern scholars have attempted to demonstrate that even during Śākyamuni's lifetime there was a range of positions on what could count as the Buddha's teachings, and it was already an accepted practice for persons other than the Buddha to teach the Dharma based on the Buddha's inspiration (*pratibhāna*) and/or permission. At least by the time of the appearance of the earliest Mahāyāna texts, issues bear-

¹⁵ This point is also noted by Buswell, "Introduction," pp. 5–6.

ing on content—whether a given doctrine or text brings its hearers or readers to liberation, and whether its message is in conformity with reality as this is understood in Buddhism—were regarded as the salient criteria of whether that doctrine or text was authentic, rather than such historical or authorial issues as whether the material in question was in fact uttered by the Buddha in those very words. Doctrines introduced by Mahāyāna Buddhism such as the ubiquitous buddha nature made it even easier to assert that an enlightened master of any age could introduce a genuine Buddhist teaching. And certainly the proliferation of buddhas and buddha fields in the Mahāyāna effectively destroyed the relevance of any attempt to equate authenticity with historical verifiability.¹⁶ Indeed, these points were not lost on the Treasure discoverers, who have not failed to cite a variety of precedents for the theory of Treasure transmission and discovery in normative Indian Buddhism.¹⁷

Thus, a critique on either historical grounds or those of authorial qualifications could not single out the Treasure genre as anomalous in relation to mainstream or canonical Buddhism. Nonetheless, the question of historical veracity in particular has posed a special problem for the Treasure proponents. It is one of the central issues raised by the Treasures' detractors, and the fact that the discoverers felt compelled to make a historical claim—that is, that a previous version of their Treasure existed at the time of Padmasambhava—shows their recognition

¹⁶ Fine studies of the points made in the last several sentences may be found in Ronald M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism," in Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, pp. 291–325; and Graeme MacQueen, "Inspired Speech in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Religion* 11 (1981): 303–19; 12 (1982): 49–65. See also Kapstein, pp. 237–39, where we see Sum-pa mKhan-po in fact arguing on historical grounds for the Treasures' inauthenticity. Sum-pa points out that these texts were not listed in the ancient Tibetan catalogs of Buddhist scriptures and maintains that Padmasambhava never composed the many Treasures that were current in Tibet by Sum-pa's time (although he does allow that the *Padma Thang yig* and the *Thang yig sde lnga* [another title for *bKa' thang sde lnga*] may have been written in some form during Padmasambhava's time). Thu'u-bkwan rebuts Sum-pa by showing that the latter in fact accepts a number of scriptures that similarly lack historical grounds for their authenticity, and that Sum-pa's own school recognizes certain Treasures and visionary scriptures.

¹⁷ In particular, a number of statements in various sūtras are cited that mention "treasures" of Dharma teachings that will be revealed to bodhisattvas and so forth. See, e.g., bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*, pp. 503–5, 512–14 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:743–44, 747–48). See also dPa'-bo gTsug-lag, 1:625. A passage not noticed by the Treasure apologists but that could well be marshaled for this purpose is the Buddha's prophecy in the thirteenth chapter of the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* that this text will "go into a cave in the ground" and 500 years later, in degenerate times, a few beings who have studied with former buddhas and who have "brought wholesome potentialities to maturity and planted seeds" will propagate the sūtra again. See Paul Harrison, "The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present": An Annotated English Translation of the Tibetan Version of the "Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1990), pp. 96–108. See also n. 10 above.

of its importance. The Treasure sects themselves were concerned with the possibility of fake Treasures, at least since the time of Guru Chos-dbang (1212–70), but within the tradition the question has always focused on an individual Treasure cycle, not on the truth of the Treasures generically.¹⁸ Thus, for example, mNga'-ris Pan-chen Padma dBang-rgyal rDo-rje (1487–1542), in his exposition of the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* Treasure discovered by Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer (1124–92), describes his own research about that cycle, stating that he was “satisfied” only after he located the original texts on “yellow paper” that had belonged to Padmasambhava's contemporary, the Tibetan king Khri Srong-lde bTsan.¹⁹ And even when a historian such as dPa'-bo gTsong-lag 'Phreng-ba (1503–65) discusses the Treasure tradition (he was the first Tibetan historian, by the way, to do so seriously and in depth), he mentions some instances of forgery and interpolation, but maintains that the authenticity of a given Treasure can be confirmed if certain signs and the characteristics of the discoverer are analyzed.²⁰

The historicity of their claims of origin shall surely remain the most dubious element in the Treasures' argument for legitimacy. Yet the overall question of the Treasures' authenticity cannot be reduced to the matter of historical veracity, since authenticity is also intimately tied to the authority of the Treasures' formulators, as well as their contents' soteriological virtues, as these are perceived in the traditional milieu. For the remainder of this essay I shall take what broadly may be construed as a phenomenological approach in order to examine the entire legitimating package offered in the Treasure tradition and to ask what for me is the most pertinent question, namely, How is authenticity, in its various di-

¹⁸ See Guru Chos-dbang, *gTer 'byung chen mo*, pp. 103–4, where he distinguishes authentic Treasure from materials that have been neither hidden nor revealed but are presented by a crazy person or outcast on a whim, materials that have been hidden properly but never revealed, and materials that are revealed but that have not been hidden previously. The passage cited below (see n. 56) regarding the warning of Guru Chos-dbang's father goes on to mention the names of several false Treasure discoverers who used their revelations to harm beings. rDo Grub-chen 'Jigs-med bsTan-pa'i Nyi-ma (1865–1926?) has an extended discussion of false Treasures, which are attributed to the prayers of evil ministers. He also discusses ways to determine whether someone is an authentic discoverer, which includes confirming visions, doctrinal debate, and examination of the yellow scroll and the style of the Treasure, which should be like that of the rDzogs-chen texts. See rDo Grub-chen 'Jigs-med bsTan-pa'i Nyi-ma, *Las 'phro gter brgyud kyi rnam bshad nyung gsal ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* (abbreviated hereafter as *gTer kyi rnam bshad*), published in *The Collected Works (Gsuñ 'Bum) of Rdo Grub-Chen 'Jigs-Med-Bstan-Pa'i-Ni-ma* (Gangtok: Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, 1975), 4:431–38. This text was translated by Tulku Thondup, Rinpoche, in *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Explanation of the Terma Tradition of the Nyingma School of Buddhism* (London: Wisdom, 1986), pp. 154–60.

¹⁹ mNga'-ris Pan-chen Padma, *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i 'chad thabs mun sel nyi zla'i 'khor lo*, in Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer, *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i chos skor* (Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1978), vol. 1, esp. p. 210 et seq.

²⁰ dPa'-bo gTsong-lag (n. 2 above), 1:625–26 et seq. See also p. 650.

mensions, established in a way that is compelling for the Treasures' creators and disciples themselves? In what follows I shall be relying primarily on statements made in the very Treasure texts in question.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TREASURE TRADITION AND ITS STRATEGIES
OF LEGITIMATION

A full account of the source of the Treasure tradition has yet to be worked out. There is reason to believe that it is based on an old and quite pragmatic Tibetan predilection to bury texts and objects that are in danger of being destroyed by enemies. Bon-po narratives recall two principal occasions when that religion was persecuted and texts were hidden as Treasures in order to preserve them for future generations: once during the anti-Bon reign of the prehistoric Tibetan king Gri-gum bTsan-po, and the other during that of the eighth-century Buddhist king Khri Srong-lde bTsan.²¹ Tibetan Buddhist histories also recall early hiding of texts in order to protect them. For example, after the death of the king Mes-ag-tshoms (ca. 750 A.D.) it is said that repressive measures taken by anti-Buddhist ministers necessitated the burial of sūtras such as the *Vajracchedikā* that had previously been brought to Tibet from China.²² These texts were then retrieved at the request of the next king, Khri Srong-lde bTsan, when he reached majority. Another suggestion of a pragmatic precedent for the Treasure tradition is the statement, also found in relatively early Tibetan histories, that,

²¹ See Samten Karmay, trans., *The Treasury of Good Sayings: A Tibetan History of Bon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 63 and 92 et seq. This is a twentieth-century work, the inheritor of a long tradition of Bon-po historical narratives. An older example of this genre of narrative is Sri Sarat Chandra Das, ed., *Gyal Rab Bon-Ke Jun Neh* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1915), which recounts the two concealments of Bon-po Treasure on pp. 42 and 50 seq. According to Karmay, p. 194, this work may have been composed in 1319.

²² dPa'-bo gTsug-lag, 1:308–9, specifies three Buddhist texts that had been brought to Tibet from China by Sang-shi, then concealed, and later read by Khri Srong-lde bTsan: the *Vajracchedikā*, the *Śālistambha*, and the *dGe ba bcu'i mdo*. See also *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* (Dharmasala: Tibetan Educational, 1968), pp. 11–21. The same sequence of events is recounted in Bu-ston Rin-chen Grub, *bDe bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod*, in *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1971), pt. 24 (ya), p. 882. Note Obermiller's incorrect translation: "He took up abode in solitude at Cho-tag" for *chos brag la sbas so* in E. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism by Bu-ston* (Heidelberg, 1932; reprint, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, Reprint Ser. 5), pt. 2, p. 187. The line should be translated, "He hid Dharma teachings in a rock." (Noted also by G. Tucci, *Minor Buddhist Texts* [Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958], pt. 2, pp. 10–11.) Another early instance of the burial of Treasures seems to be recorded only in the Treasure texts themselves, with the exception of the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* by bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan (n. 6 above), p. 345. This is the tradition that Srong-btsan sGam-po hid provisions for his royal descendants as Treasure, which is most extensively described in the *rGyal po'i bka' thang*, in O-rgyan Gling-pa, *bKa' thang sde lnga* (Paro: Ngodup, 1976), pp. 160–464; see nn. 25 and 79 below.

when the Ch'an master Hva-shang Mahāyāna was sent back to China after his loss in debate to the Indian master Kamalaśīla, his books were "hidden as treasure."²³

At some point, however, the characterization of the purpose for hiding a text shifts and is given a mantic dimension, involving reincarnation and the ability to see into the future. An early version of this new purpose is found in one of the first Buddhist Treasure cycles, Nyang-ral's *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*. This cycle states that it had been interred by Padmasambhava for a future incarnation of the king Khri Srong-lde bTsan, a devout Buddhist but busy with affairs of state, so that he could practice the complex meditations of this cycle in a future life when he had more leisure.²⁴ Later, when the Buddhist Treasure tradition is fully developed, the standard *raison d'être* for the Treasures becomes the assertion that Padmasambhava hid Treasures for all Tibetans, whom Padmasambhava could see would need certain particular meditative techniques and doctrines at certain particular times in the future.

There seems also to have been a shift in the way that the discovery of Treasures was characterized. In the case of the early pragmatic concealments, maps of the hiding spot apparently were made and handed down until the moment for unearthing arrived.²⁵ There is even an implication on the part of the Bon-pos that some of their early Treasure discoveries happened by accident, although there are also numerous early citations in Bon-po texts of prophecies and special types of magical communication facilitating Treasure discovery.²⁶ In any case, we

²³ "dPe nams bsdus te gter du sbas so" (Bu-ston, p. 890). The word *gter* here is probably not used in the technical sense we have been discussing in this essay, hence my use of the lower case for *treasure*.

²⁴ *bDe gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul*, in Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer, 1:269 et seq.

²⁵ Compare the *rGyal po'i bka' thang*'s specifications of the places where the wealth of the Yarlung kings was concealed, mentioned below in n. 79. The *byang-bu* genre discussed below is often thought to consist in specific instructions on the location of a Treasure, but in the fully developed tradition this is not a mere pragmatic notation, since its mode of transmission is as arcane as that of the Treasure itself. See Janet Gyatso, "The Relic Text as Prophecy: The Semantic Drift of *Byang-bu* and Its Appropriation in the Treasure Tradition," *Tibet Journal* ("Rai Bahadur T. D. Densapa Special Commemorative Issue") (1993), in press. It can also be noted that during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet in the 1960s many objects and texts were buried and later recovered on the basis of maps. The Bon-po master Tenzin Namdak is of the opinion that this recent recovery of hidden texts constitutes a third major incident of concealment and subsequent revelation of Treasure in Tibetan history (personal communication).

²⁶ See Karmay, p. 116 et seq. The story of the discovery by the "three ācāryas" is cast largely as a kind of accident, but even this is preceeded by the claim that it occurred "through the power of the prayers of Dran-pa Nam-mkha'." The discovery made by the three hunters (Karmay, p. 124) also appears to be understood to have been accidental. Another Treasure discovery that occurs through nonmagical means is that of Lha-dgon, who unearths texts on the basis of his great-grandfather's description of the hiding place of a Treasure cache (Karmay, p. 125). But these narratives are framed by the prophecies in the *Srid pa rgyud kyi nram thar kha byang chen mo*, an important and early Bon-po text, the

can say that, once the Treasure tradition proper is in full swing, discovery is never an accident or merely a matter of consulting a map. Rather, it is attributed to the power of the prophecy, prayers, and intentions of the concealer of the Treasure, prophecies and intentions that are compelling enough to affect the discoverer centuries later. The prophetic directives are made known to that future individual through special visionary signs that occur, according to a common trilogy, during a meditative experience (*nyams*), in a dream (*rmi-lam*), or in the waking state (*dngos*).²⁷ And no matter what state the discoverer is in when the Treasure becomes manifest to him, and in what form the Treasure appears—material relic, textual fragment, memory, or realization—the strategy of legitimating these signs and revelations becomes quite standard in the Buddhist Treasure tradition. What is happening to the discoverer is linked to the moment in the past when the Treasure was concealed; the present individual is portrayed as fulfilling a destiny established in his own past life, and the text he is uncovering as the very one (albeit in reduced, encoded form) that was hidden in that past moment, centuries previous.²⁸

There are a variety of ways in which this claim is advanced, and a variety of places in the typical Treasure cycle, that is, the corpus of texts that constitute the literary presentation of a Treasure discovery, where it is to be found. Among the many genres that make up this Treasure cycle, the central “core text” (*gzhung-rtsa*), to which all the other ritual and commentarial texts in the cycle refer, is the fundamental basis for the claim for sacred status. As I have discussed in another article, this core text (or group of texts) is a sort of “visionary document,” in that it is thought of as a kind of transcription of the actual revelation. Its statements will be placed in the mouth either of Padmasambhava or

page number references to which are supplied by Karmay. The so-called *rGyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* translated by Das in *Gyal Rab Bon-Ke Jun Neh* also already refers to the appointing of Treasure protectors and the making of prayers for the future discovery (Das, pp. 43, 50). The entire section in that text on the discovery of Treasures is even entitled “The Manner in Which the Bon Teachings Increased due to the Force of [Previous] Prayers” (p. 56).

²⁷ *dNgos* translates literally as “reality,” which would be misleading in this context, as in fact all three states are equally regarded as real (or illusory). The tripartite division of visionary experience is found at least as early as the writings of Guru Chos-dbang, as in *Chos dbang rnam thar rnal lam ma*, in *Autobiography and Instructions* (n. 6 above), 1:318 et seq.

²⁸ Regarding the encoded nature of the Treasure in the form in which it is discovered, see rDo Grub-chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, pp. 388–90, 403–7 (translated in Thondup, pp. 111–12, 126–29). See also my “Signs, Memory and History” (n. 3 above), pp. 15–22. For the process by which the discoverer translates the Treasure and commits it to conventional language and scripts, see rDo Grub-chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad*, pp. 407–14 (translated in Thondup, pp. 129–36).

the buddha who originally taught it.²⁹ The core text is sometimes even introduced by the old Buddhist canonical formula “Thus have I heard at one time,” which in itself indicates an attempt to establish the authority of the text as a representation of buddha speech.³⁰ The sacred character of the core text is also often indicated by the use of the orthographical device of the *gter-tshag* (མཇུག), which functions to distinguish the core text from those texts in the cycle that indeed are admitted to having been composed in the conventional manner by the discoverer and/or later editors. Yet another device indicating special, sacred status is the intriguing fragments of the “symbolic language of the *dākinīs*,” written in a strange, largely illegible script that we find sprinkled in the Treasure core texts.³¹ This special language or script is supposedly the one in which the Treasure was encoded while it was interred in its hiding place over the centuries, and which the discoverer translates when he decides to commit the Treasure to writing and to publish it. Such visually obvious elements came to be used universally in the Treasure texts, and they adumbrate an aura of awesome esotericism around the Treasure’s central scriptures.

But beyond the marks of sacredness written into the core texts, which imply a numinous kind of authority, there is also often included in the Treasure cycle a separate text that explicitly has as its purpose the engendering of confidence (*nges-shes bskyes-pa*) in the legitimacy of the Treasure. In fact, one or more texts of this sort are usually placed first in the cycle in its published form, as a kind of prolegomenon. There are several rubrics for texts in this category: *confidence-engendering account* (*nges-shes bskyes-pa’i lo-rgyus*), or [*account of the*] *manner in which it came* (*byung-tshul*), or [*account of the*] *coming of the Treasure* or *Dharma* (*gter-’byung* or *chos-’byung*). In essence these texts purport to give a “historical” account of the Treasure, which usually means a narrative of the origin and subsequent development and transmission of the cycle, in which the metaphysical (and, in a certain sense, ahistorical) sources of the cycle are also rehearsed. Such a text will typically consider the circumstances in which the Treasure’s teachings became relevant within the general context of the soteriological aims of Buddhism and the process by which the cycle was introduced into those circumstances. It is here, in the description of how and why the cycle

²⁹ See my “Genre, Authorship, and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism” (n. 11 above).

³⁰ An example of a Treasure core text that begins “Thus have I heard at one time” is *rTsa ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal po*, in Nyang-ral Nyi-ma ’Od-zer, 1:274.

³¹ According to dGe’dun Chos’phel (1903–51), both the *gter-tshag* and the “symbolic script of the *dākinīs*” are ancient Tibetan forms of writing. See Amdo Gedun Chopel, “The Evolution of U’med From U’chen Script,” *Tibet Mirror*, Kalimpong (January 2, 1938), reprinted in *Tibet Journal*, Dharamsala (Spring 1983), pp. 56–57.

came to be, that we find in overt form the various arguments for scriptural legitimacy that were advanced in the Treasure tradition.

On inspection of the texts presented in this confidence-engendering section, we note that they can be divided into two main types, even if such a taxonomy is not indicated in the tradition. Both types in fact narrate the origin of the Treasure cycle, but a closer reading reveals that they take two radically different approaches to what that origin is. In one, there is recounted the original formulation of the Treasure cycle by the buddha and/or the teaching and burial of the cycle by Padmasambhava. In the following discussion I will refer to this type as the *origin account*, thus reserving the term *origin* for the special sense that I will develop just below. In the other type of Treasure narrative, the later discovery of the Treasure is related. This amounts to a biographical, or often autobiographical, narrative of the process by which the cycle was revealed to the visionary. Here the emphasis is on the moment when the Treasure was first brought to light by the discoverer, in what is considered the degenerate times of the present era.³² I have labeled this type of Treasure self-legitimizing narrative the *account of the revelation*.

Both types of accounts may be represented in a given Treasure cycle, and each contains hints and references to the other, but it is significant that I have not found the two narratives presented together and contiguously in one text. We might say that there is a mute space in between them, perhaps echoing the Treasure's period in hiding.

THE ORIGIN ACCOUNT: LEGITIMATION THROUGH AUTHORITY

The degree of detail and the emphasis on one or another element of the narrative vary, but basic features are common to virtually all of the origin accounts.³³ What concerns us here, and what we should recognize as the salient feature common to all of the various versions of the origin narrative, is that authenticity is demonstrated by placing the cycle's origin within the parameters of traditions already established as authoritative. These, in this context, are the figures, places, and traditions associated with canonical scriptures known as the Old Tantras.³⁴ The

³² For the Buddhist notion of the degenerate times, see Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities, 1991).

³³ Examples of well-developed origin accounts are *bDe gshegs 'dus pa'i bka' byung tshul*, in Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer, 1:231–71; *Yid ches brgyud pa'i lo rgyus stong thun gyi spyi chings chen mo*, in *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal and Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Leh: Pema Choden, 1973), 1:3–25; and *rDzogs chen ati zab don snying po'i lo rgyus*, in gTer-bdag Gling-pa, *rDzogs pa chen po ati zab don snying po'i chos skor* (Dehra Dun: D. G. Khocchen Tulku, 1977), pp. 5–59.

³⁴ The major canonical collection of which is the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*. Several editions have been published in recent years, including one that was reproduced from the

correspondence between the source of the Treasure and that of the Old Tantras with which it is associated is often so close that sometimes the Treasure origin account has little to do specifically with the Treasure in question, but rather is a general rehearsal of the origins of those Old Tantras. Indeed the name of the Treasure cycle may not even be mentioned until the very end of the narrative, when we have arrived at Padmasambhava's period.

The Treasure origin accounts adopt, with slight modifications, the rNying-ma-pas' standard threefold paradigm for the evolution of tantric teachings: the Transmission of the Realized (*dgongs-brgyud*), the Transmission in Symbols for the Knowledge Holders (*rig-'dzin brda'-brgyud*), and the Transmission into the Ears of People (*gang-zag snyan-khung-du brgyud*).³⁵ The application of this paradigm to a Treasure in itself establishes a buddha as the ultimate source of that cycle, which in turn establishes the Treasure's sacred scriptural status.

The Treasure narrative of the threefold transmission of Buddhist scripture has close affinities to Eliade's notion of the origin myth, although it builds in several intermediary phases that are neither fully primordial nor fully "historical" in Eliade's sense.³⁶ It describes a descent from an absolute, atemporal realm to the temporal, albeit still mythologized, period of Padmasambhava's transmission of Buddhism

manuscripts preserved at Gtñ-skyes Dgon-pa-byañ, published under the direction of Dingo Khyentse Rinpoche in Thimphu in 1973, in 36 vols. These tantras were purportedly translated into Tibetan during the eighth century and preserved in the rNying-ma school. The first redactor of the collection was Ratna Gling-pa (1402–78). Some of the Old Tantras are included in the Tibetan Kanjur; the authenticity of many others is suspect in the eyes of non-rNying-ma-pa Tibetan sects. See, e.g., Roerich (n. 6 above), p. 102 et seq.

³⁵ For a discussion of these three transmissions in the general context of the Old Tantric scriptures, i.e., in a context that is not explicitly related to the Treasures, see bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung* (n. 5 above), pp. 63–78 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche [n. 5 above], 1:447–57), which quotes a variety of sources including some New Tantras. The description of the Transmission of the Realized here (translated by Gyurme and Kapstein as "intentional lineage of the conquerors") is close to its characterization in the Treasure accounts. Note that it also includes the teachings of the lower tantras by the Buddha in Tuṣita, Mt. Sumeru, Oddiyāna, and Shambala, in addition to the teachings of Samantabhadra in Akaniṣṭha. bDud-'jom's discussion of the other two transmissions (translated by Gyurme and Kapstein as "symbolic lineage of the awareness holders" and "aural lineage of the mundane individuals") differs substantially in its details from that found in the Treasure accounts. In particular, the Transmission into the Ears of People is the codification in writing of the Mahāyāna and lower tantras that occurred after the third Buddhist council under the auspices of King Lakṣāva at Mt. Abu, i.e., not the teachings conferred by Padmasambhava in Tibet as it is in the Treasure narrative.

³⁶ Mircea Eliade's principal discussion of the distinction between primordial timelessness and historical time is *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954). The notion of the origin myth as distinct from the cosmogonic myth is discussed in his *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), chap. 2.

in Tibet. The first, the Transmission of the Realized, takes place in a primordial, timeless (*dus-gsum ma-nges-pa*) realm. It is set in a buddha field, often Akaniṣṭha, where we find the primordial *ādibuddha* Samantabhadra preaching a wordless, signless teaching via a kind of mind-to-mind transmission to a group of disciples that are said not to differ from that primordial expositor. In some accounts this telepathic teaching then proceeds to be passed down by a *sambhogakāya* buddha, often Vajradhara, and a *nirmāṇakāya* buddha, often Vajrasattva.³⁷

The second stage, the Transmission in Symbols, involving such delightful sequences as when Vajrasattva teaches dGa'-rab rDo-rje in bird language, describes a transmission that is not fully verbalized but rather is indicated by virtue of a variety of semiotic moves.³⁸ This intermediate stage of transmission is already locatable in time and space, that is, in India during the period of the early rNying-ma patriarchs (whenever that was—for modern scholars the dating and even historicity of these figures remain in question). But by the time the teaching has been verbalized in the third stage, the Transmission into the Ears of People, which in all of the accounts I have seen refers specifically to Padmasambhava's transmission of the teaching in Tibet, we clearly are in a historically determinant period. Nevertheless, we need to note that this segment of the origin account is still not what modern scholars would call historical. For the Treasure discoverers, and indeed most Tibetans, the characters and events of the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet assumed in retrospect near divine proportions. The religious significance of that period evolved to the point that the deeds of kings such as Srong-btsan sGam-po and Khri Srong-lde bTsan have become the enlightened activities of bodhisattvas. Moreover, the appreciation and veneration for Padmasambhava's contribution to the Buddhism of Tibet probably far exceed the tenor of his actual reception during his life. By the time the Treasures were appearing in Tibet, the glory of the Yarlung dynasty had become the epitome of Tibetan power and innovativeness, frozen in time as the classical model of Tibetan identity. Its valorization was in particular an important ingredient in the reassertion of Tibetan independence after the fall of Mongol power in the fourteenth century.³⁹ To a certain extent this is a circular, self-reinforcing

³⁷ The Transmissions of the Realized and in Symbols is discussed further in my "Signs, Memory and History," pp. 13–15.

³⁸ As a swallow, Vajrasattva taught dGa'-rab rDo-rje with statements such as "ti-ti-ti ti-ri-ti ti-ri," by virtue of which dGa'-rab rDo-rje "understood all signs" (*Yid ches brgyud pa'i lo rgyus stong thun gyi spyi chings chen mo*, p. 13 et seq.).

³⁹ The Phag-mo Gru-pa ruler Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan (1302–64) played an important role in this movement. See Geza Uray, "The Narrative of the Legislation and Organization of the Mkhas-pa'i Dga'-ston: The Origins of the Traditions Concerning Sron-brcan Sgam-po as First Legislator and Organizer of Tibet," in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum*

phenomenon, in that some of the best-known Treasure texts (the *Mañi bka'* 'bum, the *Padma thang yig*, and the *bKa' thang sde lnga*) are the sources for the legends of Tibet's golden age, and yet it is these very legends from which the Treasures derive their legitimacy. In any case, we can say with confidence that the linkage to the Tibetan dynastic period acquires a similar borrowed authority for the Treasure cycle, as does the appropriation of the metaphysical sources of canonical Buddhist tantras.

It is in this third phase, the Transmission into the Ears of People, that Padmasambhava's rendition of the Treasure cycle is written down and then buried. This is the last event described in the origin account; sometimes it assumes greatest importance, and the earlier stages in the buddha field may even be omitted, although they will be referred to in other parts of the cycle. In any case, we need to note that this final episode does not cast Padmasambhava as the author of the Treasure, as that is a buddha. Rather, he is a middleman of sorts, one to whom "all the aspects of the stream of empowerments were transmitted" and who is thus authorized to transmit the same empowerments to his various disciples.⁴⁰ However, he is a very critical link in the Treasure teaching's transmission, and is still part of the authoritative pantheon that confers legitimacy on the discoverer's revelation. He (with the help of his Tibetan consort, the Great Bliss Queen Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal) also can be understood as a codifier, in that the text in its buried form is based on the way he taught it to his circle of students. In the course of transmitting the Treasure, Padmasambhava also renders the material in such a way that it will be appropriate for the future Tibetan sentient beings whom he has intended it to help. Then he utters a prophecy of the Treasure's future revelation (*bka'-babs lung-bstan*), performs a benedictory empowerment (*smon-lam dbang-bskur*) to ensure the fulfillment of the prophecy, and appoints protectors (*mkha'-'gro gtad-rgya*) to guard the Treasure during its interment.

Hungaricae, bk. 26 (1) (Budapest, 1972), with regard to the revival of the dynastic legal code. According to Tsepon Shakapba, *A Political History of Tibet* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 82, Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan also instituted the custom for officials to wear the costumes of the Tibetan emperors at the New Year. We may note the avid interest in the past during the fourteenth century, which produced such works as Bu-ston's *Chos-'byung*, Tshal-pa Kun-dga' rDo-rje's *Deb ther dmar po*, and bSod-nams rGyal-mtshan's *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*. This is also the period in which such pivotal Treasure discoverers as O-rgyan Gling-pa, Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, Sangs-rgyas Gling-pa, and Karma Gling-pa were active.

⁴⁰ See rDo Grub-chen, *gTer kyi rnam bshad* (n. 18 above), pp. 378–80, citing statements in the *bKa'-brgyad* Treasures of Guru Chos-dbang and Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can (the *gSang ba yongs rdzogs* and the *Drag po rang byung rang shar*, respectively). Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, pp. 102–3, and nn. 104, 105, found a similar but not exactly the same passage in the *gSang ba yongs rdzogs*.

The entire course of this origin account, from the buddha field down to the pronouncements of Padmasambhava as he conceals the Treasure, is narrated in a confident and solemn voice, often embellished with the ornate poetics appropriate for a rehearsal of sacred origins. It is of interest to note that there may be some explicit, if cryptic and very abbreviated, allusions in Padmasambhava's prophecy to the future Treasure discoverer's name, as well as hints about the circumstances of the period in which the cycle will be discovered, specifications about the site of the cache, and perhaps lists of the titles of Treasures hidden there. However, this is related in full detail only in the revelation account, the other type of confidence-engendering narrative presented in the Treasure literature.

THE REVELATION ACCOUNT: LEGITIMIZING PERSONAL DETAIL AND THE GROWTH OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

If the origin account ranges from the primordial moment in the buddha field to the golden moment of Padmasambhava's introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, the other kind of legitimating narrative in the Treasure cycles, what I am labeling the *revelation account*, is indeed located in historical time. It focuses on events in the life of the individual figure who discovered the Treasure. This is a fully historical person, even if, as we will see, his life is infused with visions and longings for the primordial or ancient golden age.

The revelation accounts are presented in the Buddhist Treasure cycles at least as early as the Treasures of Guru Chos-dbang in the thirteenth century and Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can in the fourteenth century and thus appear to have been an integral part of the literary formulation of a Treasure cycle almost as long as was the origin account.⁴¹ In many cases they are presented as separate texts, but even when such a text is not given we can see a prototype of the same sort of statement in the colophon of the Treasure core texts, which in virtually every cycle will

⁴¹ At the beginning of this project I had wrongly guessed that self-critical, individualized accounts of visionary experience would be a relatively recent phenomenon in Tibet and that the early discoverers would have presented only the authoritative assertions of the origin account to validate their Treasures. But see, e.g., *Ghuru [sic] chos dbang gis sku'i rnam thar skabs rgyad ma*, in Guru Chos-dbang, *Autobiography and Instructions*, 1:1–53; and Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus*, in *Byang gter rdzogs chen dgongs pa zang thal and Thugs sgrub skor* (Sumra, Himachal Pradesh: Orgyan Dorji, 1978), pp. 27–32. Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od zer's bKa'-brgyad Treasure also contains a revelation account, written not by the discoverer, however, but by a disciple several generations later: *Mi-'gyur rDo-rje, sPrul sku mnga' bdag chen po'i skyes rabs rnam thar dri ma med pa'i bka' rgya can*, in Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer (n. 19 above), vol. 1. As is often the case in biography, this text is devoutly hagiographical and lacks the honest and self-doubting tone discussed above.

give some minimum information about who discovered the Treasure, where, when, and perhaps how.

Like the biographical and autobiographical writing in Tibetan literature overall, to which it is closely related, the revelation account can often have a chronicle or diary-like cast. It will describe the various visions and meditative experiences of the discoverer during his course of spiritual development, especially the circumstances of the culminating definite transmission (*gdan-la 'bab-pa*), that is, the final revelation of the cycle. Some of the revelation accounts will also go on to discuss the circumstances in which the discoverer committed the Treasure cycle to writing. Moreover, those examples of the revelation account that approach being a biography or autobiography of the discoverer overall will include other, sometimes quite mundane, events in his life as well.⁴²

The personal nature of the revelation accounts, in which the frustrations and doubts of the human condition are not glossed over, contrasts strikingly with the mythical tone of the origin accounts. It is here in the life of the discoverer that the Treasure emerges from the glory of its origin in the buddha field into the daylight of the realm of human possibility. Now a very different strategy of legitimation is in evidence, bespeaking a concern with precision that is quite absent in the origin account. In particular, the emergence of the Treasure is situated on a specific date and in a specific place. Not only the year of the revelatory vision, but also the month, day, and even the hour are given.⁴³ Although temporal specification is far from unknown in Tibetan literature, the excessive concern to date precisely the Treasure's appearance probably reflects a conscious attempt to demonstrate the veracity of the revelatory event. Similarly, the place from which the Treasure was retrieved, be it "a cave on a sheer drop that is the north side of a scorpion-shaped mountain," or the "inside of the neck of a statue of a nine-headed *nāga* measuring one fathom," is often described in much

⁴² I discuss the relationship between the Treasure revelation accounts and the genre of autobiography in Tibetan literature at some length in the first chapter of my book, in progress, on the revelation accounts of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa. I would note here that often revelation accounts are published in biographies and autobiographies, independently of the published Treasure cycle.

⁴³ Many examples could be cited: Rig-'dzin rGod-Idem-can's careful recording of the date of each of his discoveries in *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus*; the specification of the "tenth day of the first month of the male iron monkey year" (1620) as the date of 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po's (1585–1656) recovery of the *dKon mchog spyi 'dus*, in sGam-po-pa Mi-pham Chos-kyi dBang-phyug (the discoverer's teacher), *Rig 'dzin 'ja' tshon snying po'i lo rgyus nam thar nyung ngur bsdu pa*, in 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po, *The Autobiography of 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po* (Bir: Kandro, 1974), p. 625; the statement that 'Jam-dbyangs mKhyen-brtse dBang-po's dream/vision of the *Grub thob thugs* thig occurred on the morning of the "fourteenth day of the middle autumn month of the male wood horse year" (1834), in Kong-sprul Blo-gros mTha'-yas, *sMin byed kyi lag len khribs su bsdebs pa legs bshad snying po*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod* (n. 5 above), 17:190; etc.

detail. Again, this enhances the sense of accuracy that the revelation account is trying to convey.

Other shows of interest in documentary detail and precision add to this impression. Often a careful list of the contents of the Treasure cache is recorded, including the size, material, and position of the various containers along with the particulars of the objects and texts contained within. This too functions to engender confidence in the revelation account's concern for accuracy. There is also awareness of the evidence offered by witnesses, particularly in the tradition of the *khrom-gter*, the public discovery of Treasure. The historian dPa'-bo gTsong-lag considers Guru Chos-dbang's use of an aide to actually take out the Treasure (once the master had "tied up the protectors" and made the other preparations) to be a sign that he was an "especially excellent" discoverer.⁴⁴

Yet despite the attempt to appear precise and to present corroborating evidence, the elusive qualities of the visionary world come to the fore in the revelation account once the description of the actual revelatory experience commences. Guru Chos-dbang notes in one of his autobiographical accounts, "If I were to write this according to the manner of the dream, it would become confused."⁴⁵ Especially in the early stages of the visionary career we find such familiar dreamlike features as things disappearing, settings changing abruptly, and characters having multiple identities. Again and again the discoverer is in view of the Treasure but cannot quite reach it, or is handed a Treasure text but cannot make out the letters. Viewed as particularly problematic is the tendency to "wake up" as soon as there is the realization that the visionary is experiencing a nonordinary reality. This syndrome calls to mind the techniques of tantric "dream yoga," where the first task, once the yogin realizes that a dream is in progress, is to learn how to remain in that dream; normally the recognition is so disorienting that the inexperienced yogin tends just to wake up.⁴⁶

The confusing and elusive character of the revelatory vision does not undermine the sense of historicity suggested by the details of time and place. Quite the contrary, this dimension of the account constitutes

⁴⁴ dPa'-bo gTsong-lag (n. 2 above), p. 639. But note Aris's skeptical view of Padma Gling-pa's public Treasure discoveries, e.g., *Hidden Treasures* (n. 14 above), p. 50.

⁴⁵ Guru Chos-dbang, *Ghuru chos dbang gi rna lam dbang bskur yongs rdzogs ma zhes kyang bya rta dkar ma*, in *Autobiography and Instructions*, 1:344. See also Guru Chos-dbang, *Guru chos dbang gis rnam thar bka' rgya brgyad ma*, in Guru Chos-dbang, *Autobiography and Instructions*, 1:133, on the problems of writing down a vision.

⁴⁶ An example of the basic instructions of the dream yoga was translated by Kazi Dawa Samdrup in W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). Many of the major dream yoga traditions are to be found in the *gDams ngag mdzod* (n. 2 above).

another compelling ground for legitimation. The discoverer's show of his own personal imperfection gives an aura of honesty to his rendering of his vision quest. Importantly, it suggests to his audience that his report of visions is not fabricated; rather, his humility engenders confidence that the revelatory visions he finally did have were indeed "really" experienced by him.

This sort of honesty and display of faults is exemplified in the two revelation accounts by 'Jigs-med Gling-pa (1729–98), famed discoverer of the *Klong chen snying thig* cycle, who records his many self-doubts in his long process of developing his readiness to receive that Treasure.⁴⁷ A typically frustrating but also humorous example of the events he relates comes at a point in his life when he is desperately searching for a reliable sign of his qualifications as a Treasure discoverer. He dreams he is led to a former cave residence of Padmasambhava's consort Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal by a group of women singing hauntingly beautiful liturgies. One woman that he thinks might be his sister whispers valuable advice in his ear. He tries to listen, but her words quickly deteriorate into an indistinct "shabi shubi shabi shubi." Recognizing he is dreaming again, he wakes up.⁴⁸ Later, in a crucial vision, the great master Klong-chen-pa gives him a rolled document containing the prophecies of his succession of lives. He makes out on the top line some critical information about one of his past lives, but when he tries to read further the text disappears like "clouds fading into the sky."⁴⁹

The difficulty in receiving the revelation clearly is often externalized as the workings of the Treasure protector (*gtar-srung*), usually an indigenous Tibetan deity who was already mentioned in the origin account as the Treasure's guardian, specially appointed by Padmasambhava when the text was hidden. Functioning as the safeguard that the

⁴⁷ These two texts are in this case given the generic label *expressions of realization* (*rtogs-brjod*, Sanskrit *avadāna*). See n. 48.

⁴⁸ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *gSang ba chen po nyams snang gi rtogs brjod chu zla'i gar mkhan* (abbreviated hereafter as *Chu zla'i gar mkhan*) in his *Klong chen snying thig* (New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1973) 1:59 et seq. This text is not, strictly speaking, the account of the revelation of the *Klong chen snying thig* Treasure, which is actually narrated in *Klong chen snying gi thig le'i rtogs pa brjod pa dākki'i gsang gtam chen mo* (hereafter abbreviated as *Dākki'i gsang gtam chen mo*), in 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Klong chen snying thig*, p. 11 et seq. Both texts are published together as the historical introduction to the *Klong chen snying thig*. *Chu zla'i gar mkhan* recounts the supporting visions that led to and succeeded the revelatory vision and thus is part of the larger narrative that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa feels obliged to present as the story of how the *Klong chen snying thig* came into existence. See my forthcoming book (see n. 42) on these texts; also Steven D. Goodman, "The *Klong-chen snying-thig*: An Eighteenth Century Tibetan Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Saskatchewan, 1983), and "Rig-'dzin 'Jigs-med gling-pa and the *kLong-Chen sNying-thig*," in Goodman and Davidson (n. 11 above), pp. 133–46.

⁴⁹ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Chu zla'i gar mkhan*, p. 65.

Treasure would not fall into the wrong hands, the protectors are related to the *dharmapālas* well known in many contexts in Buddhism. The myth of the Treasure protector is well developed by the time of the *rGyal po'i bka' thang* (fourteenth century), in which much space is devoted to specifying which protector was appointed to which Treasure and advice is given on what offerings and prayers will appease these deities so as to allow the Treasures they are guarding to be extracted.⁵⁰ This is an important element in the understanding of the revelation event, the point being that if the discoverer, or the circumstances, or the precise timing is not right, the protector will cause all manner of uproar and upheaval to prevent the revelation. The discoverers are wont to attribute any assortment of obstacles, from bad weather to flickering butter lamps to merely an inexplicable feeling that the right conditions are not present, to a sign from the protectors that further ritual or purification of the discoverer is necessary. For example, when Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can and party find themselves delayed by a detour on the road to a Treasure site, they call it a demon's interference, but counteract it by supplicating Padmasambhava.⁵¹ Similarly, Padma Gling-pa's attempt to unearth the guidebook to the "hidden country" of mKhan-pa-lung is stalled by fierce hail, rain, and gales, which are understood to be the work of the Treasure guardians.⁵² These episodes generally end when the visionary makes special prayers and the obstruction dissolves.

Both the struggle with maintaining the visionary state and the concern about the protectors reflect an important leitmotif in the revelation accounts regarding the discoverers' subjective struggles in the visionary quest. Most critically, they serve to demonstrate the discoverer's uncertainty about the authenticity of his entire project to bring forth a Treasure. It is this tone of doubt in the revelation accounts that constitutes the most striking contrast with the origin accounts and the authoritative confidence with which those narratives are recounted.

The theme of uncertainty in the revelation account is especially evident in the revelation accounts that are autobiographical. It is apparent at once in the diffident manner in which the discoverer will introduce his account, using words such as "Once, in a delusory appearance, the mirror of illusion," or "In a great lie of an experience of a deluded vision." And, throughout the account, the discoverer will continue to deprecate

⁵⁰ *rGyal po'i bka' thang* (n. 22 above). See esp. p. 420 et seq. Blondeau, "Le Lha-'Dre bKa'-thang" (n. 14 above), p. 42, recognizes the *rGyal po'i bka' thang* to be the oldest of the five *bka'-thang*, dating it to about 1368.

⁵¹ Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus*, p. 29.

⁵² This account is translated by Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1979), p. 61, from Padma Gling-pa, *Collected Works of Padma Gling-pa*, vol. pha, fols. 114b–116a.

his experience, to speak of fears that he is somehow being duped by a hallucination, even when the revelation appears to be very promising and impressive. For example, Lha-btsun Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med (1597–ca. 1650) dreams that he finds a book about the deity Ekajāṭi by Pad-masambhava, written on the standard Treasure medium of the “roll of yellow paper.” But then he tells his reader that he has heard that the text is similar to one already introduced by bDe-chen Gling-pa, and concludes that his “discovery” is nothing more than “empty flattery.”⁵³

'Jigs-med Gling-pa tells his reader of similar concerns. When as a young man he reported his revelatory vision of the *Klong chen snying thig* Treasure to his teacher, he was advised “about how the revelations of our own kind of adept lineage are genuine, our Treasure line is unbroken, and countless Dharma-doors, moreover, are coming forth, without question. . . . Nevertheless, it is extremely important for [my experiences] to be kept secret from others for a while.” Realizing his own immaturity and lack of self certainty, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa goes on to reflect:

Nowadays in the degenerate age . . . there are too many expositions of Treasures and Pure Appearances, such that the people are caught in a net of doubt. If one does not hold in the palm of the hand the sign that one has the ability to control the great secret treasury of the dākinīs oneself, then to identify the scattered verses that dawn on one—due to clarified channels and the elements' own display power—as Pure Appearance and so forth, becomes the cause for a great wave of [bad] karma. One sees and hears of much of that sort.⁵⁴

'Jigs-med Gling-pa's concern for legitimacy is also evident in another passage in his revelation account. Here he casts himself in a positive light, with the implication that the caution he feels before asserting the authenticity of his revelatory experiences contrasts favorably with the motives of many other Tibetan visionaries who, he suggests, are power-hungry charlatans who will label any random meditative experience as an authentic revelation:

When the compassion and blessings of the buddhas mix in with one's own imagination, all sorts of reflected apparitional images are possible in the ensuing great miracle. . . . But those lofty ones, conceited about their god- or ghost-blessed pure visions, magic [powers], and extra-sensory knowledges, all the

⁵³ *Lha ri 'od gsal snying gi phug pa'i dag snang dang po 'chi med lha'i dngos grub*, in (Lha-btsun) Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med, *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* (Gangtok, 1975, fol. 5b).

⁵⁴ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Ḍākki'i gsang gtam chen mo*. In sGam-po-pa Mi-pham Chos-kyi dBang-phyug, p. 625, it is related that 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po's teacher gave him virtually the same warning on keeping his visions secret “for a while.”

while attain no separation from ordinary thinking. They may have the ability to impress people on occasion, and the will-power to run after high position, but they lack the connections to achieve final liberation. So do not regard those methods as equivalent to the praxis of the sons of our lineage of adepts, the hidden yogis!⁵⁵

In these statements 'Jigs-med Gling-pa reveals several of the criteria by which he would judge a revelation to be authentic. For him the mere achievement of the creativity and supernatural power that results from the "clarified channels and elements' own display power" developed in yogic practice does not qualify one's visions to be a genuine reflection of enlightened inspiration. These powers may result in revelations, but these can originate not in a buddha but in a worldly god or spirit. Thus greater importance is attached to the level of wisdom and realization achieved by the discoverer, which makes for the ability to discern the visionary teaching that is truly beneficial to beings. A similarly soteriological orientation is expressed in the warning given to Guru Chos-dbang by his father, stressing the necessity to master the realizations and concomitant ethics of normative Tibetan Buddhism before revealing the ritual cycles associated with the Treasures:

If you would listen to me, then make the basic teachings on the Guru, the Great Perfection and Avalokiteśvara your highest priority. Until you have made the Dharma your highest priority, even a hint about magic, evil spells, catapults, weapons, omens, miracles, and other sorts of crooked crafts should not come out of your mouth! Even if one has much learning, if one does not hold [the Dharma] most highly, one winds up a beggar in the end. In general, I in no way would disparage the Treasure teachings. In the Buddha's sūtras and tantras, the Treasures are prophesied. They were the practice of the Knowledge Holders of old. But previously many Treasure discoverers who had extracted Treasures had small minds, did not hold the Dharma purely, were concerned only with sustenance and riches, and thus did not help beings much; many have been like that. For example, rGya Zhang-khrom, although he discovered many of the Treasures of sNubs, propagated negative mantras and damaged the welfare of beings [etc.].

Guru Chos-dbang's father goes on to list the destructive results of the work of a number of Treasure discoverers who neglected the important principles of compassion and selflessness.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Chu zla gar mkhan*, pp. 21–22.

⁵⁶ dPa'-bo gTsug-lag, pp. 639–40. There is a very similar passage in bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung* (n. 5 above), p. 533 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche [n. 5 above], 1:764–65). The passage may be traced to Guru Chos-dbang's own writings: see his *gTer 'byung chen mo* (n. 6 above), pp. 135–36.

PROOF FROM WITHIN

That spiritual realization is presented as a necessary condition for the receipt of a revelation is reminiscent of a defense of scriptural authenticity found in Indic Mahāyāna sūtras, namely, the argument that a disciple of the Buddha with direct experience of the Dharma is qualified to deliver a teaching that genuinely would stem from the Buddha's own power (*anubhāva*).⁵⁷ The fact that the discoverer's level of realization needs to be established in order for that individual's revelation to be judged authentic goes a long way to explain a striking anomaly that we can notice in the revelation accounts: despite the diffidence and self-doubt that, as we suggested above, these narratives are at pains to display, we also find, sometimes in a contiguous passage, outright claims by the discoverer of his own high spiritual attainments. Such self-assertion is rare in Tibetan literature, but, as I have pointed out in another essay, it is a move made in certain kinds of autobiographies in order to establish the self as a suitable exemplar for students.⁵⁸ In the context of the Treasure tradition, it complements the pose of humility, and in the end illustrates that the discoverer is not only cautious and hardworking, but also, eventually, a successful practitioner. It all adds up to show that his revelations can be trusted to be legitimate.

Padma Gling-pa (1450–1521), famed as one of the five “Treasure discoverer kings,” writes an essay in defense of his personal honesty, inner realization, and suitability as a Treasure discoverer in response to aspersions cast on the genuineness of his Treasure teachings. He self-righteously proclaims, “It seems that I am the Holder of the Buddha's Teachings in the degenerate age. Through my previously-developed good karmic propensities, my Treasure teachings on the profound essential mind of O-rgyan eliminate the need for evil actions and illuminate the nature of the mind; thus have I realized the dream-like illusory nature of all phenomena in existence.” He goes on to argue that, if indeed he were a charlatan, his deception would be extremely grave: “If I am only claiming to have great realization, the leaves of the five poisons would be rife. . . . If, though posing as a great yogin, I am swayed only by the eight *dharmas*, it would be gross (deception).”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ This argument is made at least as early as *Ratnagūṣaṇḍīcayagāthā* 3–4. The first forty-four verses of this Prajñāpāramitā text are dated by Edward Conze to the first century B.C.: see Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (Bollingen: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), p. x. See also MacQueen's and Davidson's articles, cited above, n. 16.

⁵⁸ Janet Gyatso, “Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature: Reflections on Its Modes of Self-Presentation,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Narita 1989, ed. Shōren Ihara and Zuihō Yamaguchi (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992), pp. 465–78.

⁵⁹ Padma Gling-pa, *Padma gling pa'i gsung 'gros log lta can sun 'byin pa seng ge'i ngaro*, in *The Rediscovered Teachings of the Great Padma Gling-pa* (Thimphu: Kunsang

In the same vein, Lha-btsun Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med relates five momentous experiences of meeting face-to-face with a master of the past, as proof of the important insights that he has reached. For example, he tells his reader that he came across Thang-stong rGyal-po (1361–1485) as a *ṛṣi* living in the mountains amongst wild animals; when the *ṛṣi*'s pot of boiling soup broke, Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med realized the truth of impermanence and the interpenetration of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.⁶⁰ This and the other four visions he records are not specifically connected to his *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* Treasure. But they are related in the section of that cycle devoted to the account of the Treasure's sources because they demonstrate that the discoverer has realized the nondifference between what appears in ordinary perception and in the visionary state—in other words, it proves he has become qualified to reveal the profound contents of the cycle proper.

In short, the discoverer's own level of realization is presented as a crucial proof of the validity of his Treasure texts. One of the important signs of this realization is the yogic skill that is a prerequisite for the occurrence of an authentic revelation. We have already seen how a vision can dissolve before the eyes of the visionary who has not mastered the requisite skills to maintain it. In a number of cases, descriptions of Treasure revelations are couched precisely in yogic terms. Guru Chos-dbang is said not to have been able to understand, and thereby transmit in Tibetan, the *gSang ba yongs rdzogs man ngag* Treasure cycle he had discovered until he engaged in yogic practices with his consort Jo-mo sMan-mo that opened up his yogic central channel.⁶¹ The hagiography of gTer-bdag Gling-pa (1634–1714) relates the discoverer's yogic achievements in considerable detail.⁶² 'Jigs-med Gling-pa quotes a canonical description of the meditative state that is concomitant with a revelation; its concordance with his own meditative experiences becomes another source of confidence for him to pursue his visionary quest.⁶³ And later he asserts, "The ability to get a transference of a Transmission of the Realized for this [Treasure] is difficult always to maintain. Other than fully perfecting the display power [resulting from] vital wind entering, abiding, and dissolving in the central [channel], there is no other [means to get it]."⁶⁴

Topgay, 1975). The eight dharma's are gain, loss, blame, acclaim, praise, ridicule, sorrow, and joy.

⁶⁰ Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med, *Dag snang lo rgyus zab don rtogs pa'i sgo 'byed*, fol. 2b, in his *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*.

⁶¹ bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*, p. 545 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:773).

⁶² bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung*, pp. 610–12 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:828–31).

⁶³ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Chu zla'i gar mkhan* (n. 48 above), pp. 30–31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

PROOF FROM WITHOUT

Thus we can say that the requisite show of caution and self-doubt is in some ways at odds with the advanced spiritual realizations and meditative agility that also need to be demonstrated in the revelation account. We can also note a further irony of the Treasure discoverer's logic of legitimation. Despite the importance given to the discoverer's various subjective qualities that we have just been discussing, most of the revelation accounts assign much responsibility for the revelation's occurrence to factors that are perceived as being external to the visionary. Significantly, the very receipt of a revelation itself is usually characterized as an intervention by Padmasambhava or some other teacher or deity.

Of course, there is something of a circular argument here, to the extent that such intervention is understood to occur only for those who are capable and worthy of it. Moreover, the very receipt of a revelatory transmission becomes simultaneously an aid in the development of the discoverer's personal qualifications, and a confirmation of those qualifications, as in the case of Padma Gling-pa cited above, where the Treasures he vindicates by describing his spiritual realizations have themselves endowed him with those realizations.

Be this as it may, virtually all of the revelation accounts describe epiphanies who at various stages in the visionary quest play critical roles. One function that they have is to confirm the discoverer's qualifications and give him confidence. In Lha-btsun Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med's dream/vision, a *ḍākinī* places a tablet with one hundred tastes on his tongue, saying that it is an indication that the full accomplishment will come to him.⁶⁵ In an early vision, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa is shocked when the deity gNod-sbyin Chen-po in the guise of an elderly monk bows to him, a youth, but the deity explains that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa is an incarnation of Nanda, the sibling of Śākyamuni. The effect of this incident is that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's mistaken "habit to conceptualize" disappears.⁶⁶

Supernatural agents also serve the critical function of bringing the location of the Treasure site to the attention of the discoverer. In Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can's case, this takes the form of a repeated appearance of light rays and rainbows that hit a particular spot on the mountain, a spot that becomes the place where he digs up a Treasure.⁶⁷ A similar story is told of Thang-stong rGyal-po, who found his cache of Treasures

⁶⁵ Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med, *Lo rgyus gab shas rdo rje'i srog snying rig 'dzin dgongs pa'i lde'u mig*, fol. 4a, in his *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub*.

⁶⁶ "Der da lta'i rnam rtog rang sar yal" ('Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Chu zla'i gar mkhan*, pp. 44–45). 'Jigs-med Gling-pa refers his reader in an interlinear note to the *Ānandagarbhāvrāntinirdeśa* and the *Ayushmanandagarbhāvrāntinirdeśa* of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* (Toh. 57 and 58).

⁶⁷ Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus* (n. 41 above), *passim*.

at bSam-yas by following a red light that turned into the *dhāraṇī* of Amitāyus. In many other instances a theophany, often a female *ḍākinī*, literally leads the discoverer to the spot, as occurs when 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po is taken to the site where the *dKon mchog spyi 'dus* Treasure is concealed.⁶⁸

In the case of the transmission of Mental Treasures, the onset of the revelatory vision, again, is heralded by an external intervention. In 'Jam-dbyangs mKhyen-brtse'i dBang-po's case, Padmasambhava takes hold of him (*rjes-su bzung*) and the *ḍākinīs* enter his nerve channels, causing the *Grub thob thugs tig* Treasure to shine forth effortlessly in his mind.⁶⁹ The same external assistance is operative in the critical and often difficult moment when the visionary takes courage to commit the Treasure to writing and to transmit it to students for the first time. For mChog-gyur Gling-pa, inspiration appears in the form of the bodhi-sattva Tārā, who "breathes into him" and repeats the same "All right!" affirmation thrice, after which the visionary is empowered to write out the *sGrol ma'i zab tig* cycle.⁷⁰

The prophecies, directives, and inspiration granted by the various tantric deities, Padmasambhava, and other revered masters of the past are, by virtue of those figures' exalted status, ipso facto genuine. A central element of the force of these external figures' role is thus not limited to the content of their directives, even if that conveys such crucial information as the location of the Treasure site or how to do the appropriate meditation exercises to facilitate a revelation. What is also critical is the fact that such inspiration or direction has been given at all. The occurrence, in itself, of encouragement or instruction given by the exalted envisioned figure is taken by the discoverer as a special sign (*brda'-rtags*), the same sign that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa asserted to be more important than yogic agility in order to know "that one has the ability to control the great secret treasury of the *ḍākinīs* oneself."

One is reminded here of the importance attached to the auspicious sign in so many domains of Tibetan culture. All manner of encouraging dreams and visions, fortuitous confluences in nature or human events, and other synchronistic perceptions are forever being sought as confirmations of the rightness of one's undertakings, both religious and secular.⁷¹ But here in the Treasure tradition the sign takes on a very particular signification, one that connotes what is the principal distinguishing feature of

⁶⁸ sGam-po-pa Mi-pham dBang-phyus (n. 43 above), p. 626.

⁶⁹ *sGrub thabs snying po skor lnga*, in Kong-sprul, ed., *Rin chen gter mdzod* (n. 2 above), 3:452.

⁷⁰ bDud-'joms, *Chos-byung*, p. 636 (translated in Dudjom Rinpoche, 1:846).

⁷¹ See Norbu Chopel, *Folk Culture of Tibet* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983), for a translation of a variety of texts on what he calls "superstitions" and the plethora of omens that are recognized in Tibetan culture.

the genre overall, namely, the claim that the Treasure was preached previously and was then hidden so as to be recovered in the future. What the visionary must have so that his revelation is regarded as authoritative is some kind of evidence that he is in fact the intended discoverer referred to in the prophecy made by Padmasambhava back when the Treasure was concealed. This returns us to the historical dimension of the Treasures' self-legitimizing claim and underlines the fact that, even though the discoverer's personal qualifications are critical, he must also demonstrate that his Treasure revelation was already predicted in the past.

Even in the tersest revelation accounts, where the nature of the events heralding the discovery is not elaborated, such euphemisms as "the time was right" (*dus-la 'babs*), or "causes and conditions came together" (*rten-'brel 'grigs*) for the "destined one" (*skal-ldan*), indicate that the set of signs concatenating in the discoverer's experience were previously determined by Padmasambhava. In the more detailed accounts, we can notice one special type of encouraging sign that in particular hearkens back to something that occurred in the past. This comes in the form of a small text, a special Treasure genre which is labeled *byang(-bu)*, and it appears, in its own minirevelation, during the vision quest at some point. Perhaps because the Treasure tradition is after all a cult of the written word, the *byang-bu* text, the sign that is given in writing, stands out as the definitive indication that an authentic, predetermined revelation is in the process of unfolding.

THE WRITTEN SIGN: CERTIFICATE OF CERTAINTY

Thus we may briefly consider a third type of text, which, though not usually included in the confidence-engendering section, is intimately involved with legitimation of a Treasure cycle. This text is usually received or discovered by the visionary prior to the revelation of the Treasure itself. It is identified by a generic label that generally ends on the suffix *byang(-bu)*, which literally means "piece" but in this context may be translated as "certificate."⁷² Some of the common variations of this label include the address or entrance certificate (*kha-byang*), key certificate (*gnad-byang*), essential certificate (*snying-byang*), list certificate (*tho-byang*), and further certificate (*yang-byang*), which is received at some point after the initial *byang-bu* text. These and the other *byang-bu* labels that occur are not, however, distinguished in any con-

⁷² The full term is *byang-bu*, but in compounds it is abbreviated *byang*. I have discussed the etymology of this term and the reasons for translating it as "certificate" in "The Relic Text as Prophecy" (n. 25 above). We need also to note here that there are a number of other uses in Tibetan literature of the *byang* suffix as a genre label—*las-byang*, "manual for practice," is one example—with no connotation of certification or authorization at all. Texts of the *las-byang* genre can appear in a Treasure revelation, but with no connection to the legitimizing, historical section of the cycle we are discussing in this paper.

sistent way.⁷³ The actual examples of *byang-bu* texts that are preserved in the Treasure collections seem to be able to have any one of these labels in their titles, regardless of content. Thus, it is most pertinent to examine the genre as a whole.

The *byang-bu* certificates that I have been able to examine vary widely in content. But by and large they will cover some aspect of the same material that was already given in one of the two types of legitimating accounts we have studied above. Some of the certificates simply recount the origin of the Treasure, as does the register certificate (*them-byang*) of Karma Gling-pa's *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*, which consists almost entirely in a general recounting of the 84,000 Dharma-doors of the Buddha's teachings. This text in fact barely mentions the *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol* cycle at all, except to discuss briefly in its conclusion how that Treasure fits into the *atiyogatantra* class of the Buddha's teachings.⁷⁴

More commonly the certificates describe the later revelation of the Treasure by the Tibetan discoverer. Here, however, the important distinction to be noted is that the certificate does not narrate the revelation as a past event, as does the revelation account. Rather, the *byang-bu* certificate relates the events of the revelation in the future tense, in the form of a prophecy authored by Padmasambhava. In this way the *byang-bu* is most akin to the origin account, which, as we have already seen, will also sometimes include prophecies of the revelation.

The *byang-bu* certificate prophecy will often make explicit references to the discoverer's identity, family, and even his physical appearance. It is particularly common for the name of the discoverer to be worked into the text, as, for example, in mChog-'gyur Gling-pa's compendium certificate (*mdo-byang*), which predicts, "In about thirteen generations, someone called mChog-'gyur bDe-chen Gling-pa will discover the basic inner *sādhana* at Kha-brag-gnas."⁷⁵ Rig-'dzin rGodldem-can's list certificate (*tho-byang*) describes in its prophecies the discoverer's homeland, the families of his ancestors, his personal characteristics, the locations of his discoveries, and the physical appearance of the *ḍākinīs* that will lead him to those sites.⁷⁶

⁷³ See Thondup's discussion of the *byang* (translated "prophetic guide") in *Hidden Teachings* (n. 18 above), pp. 72–77.

⁷⁴ *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi them byang*, in Karma Gling-pa, *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor* (Gangtok: Sherab Lama, 1976), pp. 1–6.

⁷⁵ *Lo rgyus chos kyi mdo byang*, in *The Collected Rediscovered Teachings (gTer-ma) of gTer-chen mChog-gyur Gling-pa* (New Delhi: Patshang Lama Sonam Gyaltzen, 1975), 1:3 (*Bla ma thugs sgrub bar chad kun sel* cycle).

⁷⁶ *sNyan rgyud drug gi tho byang lung bstan rin po che'i lde'u mig*, in Rig-'dzin rGodldem-can, *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal and Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (n. 33 above), vol. om, pp. 77–90.

Another feature of some of the certificates that is distinctly personal for the discoverer is a prediction of the various visions that will occur during the revelation period. In 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's key certificate, significant experiences in the discoverer's life are hinted at, and meditational and other directions are given so that he will be able to respond properly and recognize the various messengers of Padmasambhava.⁷⁷ A similarly prophetic text is 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po's collection of certificates, which depict each visionary landscape that the discoverer will encounter.⁷⁸

The certificates also offer much practical information. They often list the locations where the discoverer's destined Treasures are hidden, and sometimes they also specify the rituals that will appease the protectors so as to facilitate the uncovering of the hidden material. An early example of this is the lengthy *Kha byang mdzod kyi lde mig rgyud* found in the *rGyal po' bka' thang*, which lists the geomantical specifications of the king's treasures.⁷⁹ Some of the certificates are little more than a table of contents to the cycle. But this does not mean that the certificate is merely a list; rather, such a list has a special function, namely, to prevent interpolations or omissions. As one entrance certificate states, "There are fifty-one essential sections of the teachings of the *Srog sgrub 'od gsal snying gi thig le*. If there are more or less than that, the teaching has been compromised. For that reason, you should prize this entrance certificate."⁸⁰

Finally, some certificates are little more than a *sādhana*, as is the register certificate for the *dGongs pa zang thal* Treasure,⁸¹ or a treatise on the path of practice in general, as is the essential certificate of the *Bar chad kun sel* Treasure.⁸² In these cases, the implication seems to be that the practices described in the certificate would engender the realization necessary to reveal the Treasure itself.

Regardless of its content, great significance is attached to the *byang-bu* text. It functions to certify both the discoverer personally, and the contents of the Treasure that will be discovered. For 'Jigs-med Gling-

⁷⁷ *gNad byang thugs kyi sgrom bu*, in 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Klong chen snying thig* (n. 48 above), 1:69–78.

⁷⁸ *Yang zab nor bu'i lde mig*, in 'Ja'-tshon sNying-po, *dKon mchog spyi 'dus kyi chos skor* (New Delhi: Topden Tshering, 1977) pp. 13–25. The key (*lde-mig*) and its relation to the *byang* certificates need to be explored further. This text is an example of a written key and contains various statements labeled as *kha-byang*, *gnad-byang*, *dus-byang*, *snying-byang*, and *yang-byang*.

⁷⁹ *Kha byang mdzod kyi lde mig rgyud*, in forty-four chapters, presented in chap. 18 of the *rGyal po'i bka' thang* (n. 22 above), pp. 301–423.

⁸⁰ *Kha byang nyi ma'i 'khor lo*, in Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med, *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* (n. 53 above), fols. 3b–4a.

⁸¹ *Lus can gyi them byang*, in Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal and Ka dag rang byung rang shar*, vol. om, pp. 91–97.

⁸² *Zhal gdams snying byang yid bzhin nor bu*, in *The Collected Rediscovered Teachings (gTer-ma) of gTer-chen mChog-gyur Gling-pa*, pp. 7–633.

pa, the receipt in a vision of a certificate that predicts the names of his previous incarnations (*skye-brgyud lung-byang*) is a critical element in his achievement of the requisite “permission to compose the teachings” of his Treasure cycle: it certifies that he is in the reincarnation lineage of the discoverer whose destiny is that very revelation.⁸³ When Thang-stong rGyal-po (whose discoveries of iron ore in Kong-po are treated as a type of Treasure revelation!) meets the protectors of that area (*gzhibdag*), they tell him that formerly other prominent discoverers had offered them traditional ritual cakes (*gtor-ma*) in hopes of finding the hidden ore, but the protectors had reserved the entrance certificate and keys to the area for Thang-stong, the true emanation of Padmasambhava.⁸⁴ Again, we can see that the certificate serves to point out who is the authentic discoverer. And, when the *byang-bu* is a list of the Treasure’s contents, it serves to certify what may be removed from a Treasure cache. Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can follows his certificate’s list of his allotted Treasures so closely that he even declines to keep the jewels that he finds “sticking to his joints” as he is scooping out the texts from the cache, because the certificate does not mention the jewels.⁸⁵

In some cases the recipient of a certificate does not use the text—that is, follow its injunctions to discover a Treasure—but rather hands it down until it reaches the “right person.” According to dPa'-bo gTsug-lag 'Phreng-ba, this was the case for Guru Chos-dbang, who inherited the entrance certificate of Grva-pa mNgon-shes (ca. 1012–91).⁸⁶ Furthermore, the mere possession of a certificate is not enough to allow the revelation. If obtained by the wrong person, through wrong means, or at the wrong time, it will not lead to the discovery, much as, we might say, an illicitly obtained ticket to a private party may not prevent one from being recognized at the door as an intruder and turned away. Simply to have the “address” of the Treasure does not suffice; the address must have been expressly given by the owner of the Treasure, that is, Padmasambhava or one of his representatives. Thus it is said that before Guru Chos-dbang inherited his entrance certificate, one Lha-gzo 'Jam-dpal had died while trying to use it in order to discover a Treasure, and others had perished by lightning and hail when following the instructions of such a text without authorization.⁸⁷

On the other hand, to possess a *byang-bu* certificate, even legitimately, is considered to be dangerous, which is the reason that Guru Chos-dbang’s father confiscates and hides the document from the

⁸³ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Chu zla'i gar mkhan* (n. 48 above), p. 65.

⁸⁴ Lo-chen 'Gyur-med bDe-chen, *Grub pa'i dbang phyug chen po lcags zam pa thang stong rgyal po'i rnam thar ngo mtshar kun gsal nor bu'i me long gsar pa* (Bir: Kandro, 1976), p. 135 et seq.

⁸⁵ Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can, *gTer gton pa'i lo rgyus*, p. 30.

⁸⁶ dPa'-bo gTsug-lag (n. 2 above), pp. 637–38.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

youth. But as 'Jigs-med Gling-pa notes, "Still, if some sort of urging certificate [*bskul-byang*] from the heroes and dākinis does come to one, one will not have the power not to do [its bidding,] since [not to do its bidding] would damage the connections of one's life and enlightened activity."⁸⁸ In other words, once one receives a *byang-bu*, it is dangerous *not* to follow through with the Treasure revelation. The appearance of the *byang-bu* text conveys to its rightful recipient the grave responsibility to discover the Treasure. To disobey would be to violate the predictions of the text itself. The perceived character of the certificate in Guru Chos-dbang's time is described by bDud-'joms Rinpoche thus: "If one kept an entrance certificate at home, its magical power became unbearable. Yet even if one would leave it in a narrow passageway, at a crossroads, throw it in the water, or bury it in the ground, it would not be destroyed by the elements. But it also could not be held. Thus was it called the Destructive Yellow Paper."⁸⁹

In short, a numinous power is attributed to the *byang-bu* certificate, as if it had a special force of its own. Yet how and why it is viewed as having such compelling power is still not entirely clear. This power cannot derive solely from what the text says, since that can vary so widely. Moreover, the certificate's content almost always repeats some part of what is already contained in the origin or revelation accounts, and so we must also ask why it is necessary for that material to be presented again in a separate text, revealed to the discoverer prior to the full revelation of the Treasure itself.

What is clear about the certificate is the role we see it playing in the auto/biographical accounts of the discoverer. Without doubt the certificate is portrayed there as having legitimation as its critical function; it is for that reason that its appearance bolsters the discoverer's confidence and encourages him to commence the discovery and codification of the Treasure proper. As such, whatever we will be able to say about how the *byang-bu* exerts the compelling power that it does will have to be understood in terms of the overall legitimating package that the Treasure cycle presents, on which we might now reflect briefly.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, the issue of scriptural legitimacy is important enough to necessitate the creation of an entire section of the Treasure, the confidence-engendering account, which is devoted to establishing such

⁸⁸ 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, *Ḍākki'i gsang gdam chen mo* (n. 48 above), p. 11.

⁸⁹ bDud-'joms, *Chos 'byung* (n. 5 above), p. 530 (translated slightly differently in Dudjom Rinpoche [n. 5 above], 1:763). Leaving a magically charged object at a crossroads or burying it is a common method in Tibetan ritual for ridding oneself of that object's influence.

legitimacy. We have been able to identify two distinct approaches in presenting this legitimating narrative: the account of the origin of the Treasure, and the auto/biographical account of the events surrounding its revelation. In the first, the discussion centers on the ultimate source of the Treasure, which begins with a buddha and culminates in an ancient master such as Padmasambhava. The other approach, the revelation account, narrates the spiritual development of the contemporary visionary who receives and codifies the scripture in its current form. Both of these approaches are making historical claims about the Treasure's origins: in the one, that the Treasure comes from a primordial buddha, as mediated by a great teacher of the past; in the other, that the Treasure's latter-day discovery was unfabricated and genuine. But both accounts also appeal to another and ultimately more critical measure of scriptural legitimacy, namely, the qualifications of the Treasure's formulator. And, although this formulator is identified at two quite distant poles—one in buddha fields or golden ages, and the other in the world of human beings of the degenerate age—in both accounts this figure is portrayed in such a way that “engenders confidence” that the Treasure's content can be trusted as an authentic Buddhist teaching.

The strategy of attributing a scripture to a buddha had been already amply employed in the Mahāyāna sūtras and the tantras, virtually all of which were simply placed in the mouth of some buddha, preaching in some pure land or imputed earthly location. But the Treasure tradition is unique in naming and attempting to authorize those persons who “discover,” reformulate, and present a scripture in a given contemporary period. This is a risky business on several of the counts we have been considering here. In attempting to confirm the discoverer's personal qualities, the auto/biographical revelation accounts employ the surprising but convincing strategy (convincing especially in the Tibetan world) of trading on a show of self-doubt and honesty. This serves the critical function of creating a credible context in which the virtues and achievements of the individual visionary can be advanced without being too obviously self-aggrandizing.

But the show of self-doubt has far-reaching effects on the nature of the Treasure-legitimizing strategy overall, above all regarding what that has to do with time and history. And here we need to note that we have significantly exceeded the issue of historical veracity raised in the beginning of this paper, and rather are considering the connection between the person of the Treasure discoverer and historical time as such. What the self-doubt of the revelation account ultimately has as its effect is to prevent the living master from achieving full “timelessness.” As a result, a very different dynamic is in operation than what an Eliadian reading of the relationship between the two types of Treasure-legitimizing

narratives might have predicted, whereby the discoverer would be made to recreate a unity with Padmasambhava and the underlying primordial buddha. This does not happen in the revelation account. Indeed, the theory of Treasure transmission is not predicated on the discoverer's achievement of full buddhahood, despite the high realizations that are attributed to him. Instead, the Treasure's revelation occurs *in* historical time, by virtue of what might be called a dynamics of incursion, an incursion of the primordial and authoritative past into the present moment of the degenerate age. The two are not completely collapsed, and this is especially evident in the way in which the themes of absence, loss, and doubt dominate the revelation accounts. The happy ending of perfection is missing from these accounts. Rather, the Treasure discoverer keeps reformulating other versions of his Treasure, and fighting off obstacles in the process, in the form of evil spirits and real, live detractors.

What the Treasure-legitimizing narratives entail, then, rather than a collapse of the historical into the primordial, is the construction of a link, a bridge, between the scene of the origin of the Treasure and the present context in which its revelation is taking place.⁹⁰ In fact, we can note that there actually are two bridges—one between the primordial scene of the buddha field and Tibet's golden age of Padmasambhava and the Dharma kings, and the other between Padmasambhava's scene and the degenerate times in which the Treasure is introduced to the Tibetan public—but it is the latter bridge that appears to be the critical one. This linkage is accomplished by a doubling act, in which the reader sees the same (or almost the same) figures appearing in both of the domains thereby linked.⁹¹ There are several things that put in this double appearance. One of them, of course, is the Treasure discoverer himself: he is here now, but, by virtue of a past life, he also partakes in the earlier, authoritative transmission of the Treasure, when he was originally designated, made to be an essential ingredient in the Treasure scripture's future trajectory. Padmasambhava also appears twice, although the second time only as a trace, and only in the limited arena of the visions of the discoverer. Nonetheless, a sighting of this revered master becomes an important sign of the authenticity of the discover-

⁹⁰ rDo Grub-chen has a special theory about how this linkage is accomplished, which he thematizes in terms of Padmasambhava's appointment (*gtad-rgya*) of particular disciples to be particular discoverers in the future. This appointment is conveyed in an empowerment ceremony, whereby it is indestructibly implanted in the recipient's mind in the form of some kind of arcane, abbreviated code and maintained there over lifetimes until the time is right for its revelation and representation as a full-length text. See *gTer kyi rnam bshad* (n. 18 above), p. 383.6 et seq. (translated in Thondup, *Hidden Teachings* [n. 18 above], p. 106).

⁹¹ My thematization of the phenomenon of doubling in what follows is indebted to Bernard Faure's fine and provocative book, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

er's visionary experiences. The Treasure scripture itself is a double agent too: like the discoverer, it is here now, but what makes it so numinous and legitimate is that it was present in the earlier period as well. Doubling is also accomplished by the mutual referencing between the origin and revelation accounts, whereby each often corroborates the other by describing a similar scene.⁹² Finally, and to rejoin the questions raised above about the *byang-bu* certificate, I would submit that the *byang-bu* is one more reiterative device to establish a link between the past and the present.

In the case of the *byang-bu*, what it repeats is itself a double agent, the Treasure scripture. The *byang-bu* was produced at the time of the concealing of the Treasure as an added insurance of the Treasure's future successful revelation. It is a miniature Treasure in itself, appearing before the main Treasure, containing some of the same information, and heralding that larger revelation's imminent appearance. Moreover, the *byang-bu* is particularly significant in that it focuses on the person of the discoverer, which we have seen to be a crucial part of the Treasure's legitimating package. Whether it explicitly contains a prophecy that names the discoverer, or simply conveys instructions that are understood as being meant to help the discoverer find his fated Treasure, the *byang-bu* serves to certify the one for whom it was meant. It is a special missive sent by Pamasambhava into the present experience of the visionary, and as such it becomes a relic, or remnant, from the golden period of the origin of the cycle. Merely to have it in hand is to have a key to that earlier period. Further, because of the sacred power attributed, ipso facto, to a prophecy uttered by the exalted Padmasambhava, its predictions take on a compelling force that must be fulfilled. This accounts for the supernatural, numinous qualities attributed to the text. And when the content of the *byang-bu* goes on to name the discoverer, and further to "corroborate" the personal experience of the visionary as having already been predicted in that authoritative moment in the past, the text has fulfilled its purpose. It has acquired a powerful credibility by virtue of which the discoverer makes the difficult transition from diffidence to self-confidence and feels empowered to tell the world that he has been exhorted to reveal a Treasure.

If we began our analysis with a clear dichotomy of two types of legitimating narratives in the Treasures, we have ended with an appreciation of the fact that the two need to be connected, even if they are not

⁹² For example, it is related in the *Yid ches brgyud pa'i lo rgyus stong thun gyi spyi chings chen mo* (n. 33 above), p. 20, that Padmasambhava hid the *dGongs pa zang thal* cycle in the "waist" of Mt. Zang-zang Lha-brag; the colophon of the same text on p. 25 (in this case this brief colophon acts as a revelation account) states that Rig-'dzin rGod-ldem-can extracted the Treasure from the waist of Mt. Zang-zang Lha-brag.

fully collapsed. What is lost in paying some heed to historical circumstances and thereby forestalling pure timelessness is at least partially regained by the construction of corroborating evidence in the form of double agents. In attempting thereby to bridge the abyss between the primordial origin of buddha speech and the actions and experiences of historical figures operating in human time, the Treasure tradition has provided a way to produce texts that, at least in their own milieu, came to be deemed authentic Buddhist scripture, long after the classical canon was closed.

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